# Kierkegaard's Leap into Faith

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Kierkegaard's body of work comprises over 30 volumes in the Danish edition and was produced in barely fifteen years by a single individual whose abnormal talent and intellectual passion possess something terrifying. Kierkegaard belongs to those few minds who attract and captivate precisely by repelling. In view of the many commemorative speeches currently being held in his honor, he himself would presumably turn in his grave and remark with superior irony that people have turned a "corrective" into a norm and a "demand" into a "system".

The historical fate of his literary output is quite extraordinary: his work, which—with the exception of his daily journals spanning many volumes—was completed in Danish around 1855, became generally accessible and known only half a century later. Kierkegaard's writings exerted their broadest influence immediately after the First World War, only to be appropriated in the 1920s more or less by theologians (K. Barth, R. Bultmann) and philosophers (K. Jaspers, M. Heidegger). This peak of interest in Kierkegaard is likely already past today, now that the historical-critical edition is complete and two new German translations are appearing. Unless one *is* a Kierkegaard, one cannot hold oneself for decades on the outermost pinnacle of a paradox and restrict reflection on the world and humanity to the single point of the "decision" for or against traditional Christianity.

"The spiritual situation of the age," as Jaspers aptly characterized it in 1931, no longer stands under the sign of Kierkegaard, and only partially under that of Nietzsche. It stands under no prominent or nameable sign at all, unless it be that of a temporary restoration and vague expectations of what is to come. Kierkegaard would hardly complain about no longer evoking the same interest today as he did thirty years ago, for he condemned interest in the "interesting" as an evasion of the seriousness of ethical and religious decision. At that time, Kierkegaard's writings were not merely read by isolated individuals, but devoured by many alongside the works of Dostoevsky and Nietzsche. He had something to say that no one else had yet said in quite that way, and which, in a manner hard to define, was evidently

timely. But the watchword and public secret of the interwar era was the drive toward a decision—a drive that Marx and Kierkegaard, in a different yet similar situation a century earlier, had been the first to elevate to a principle. Marx decided against the bourgeois-capitalist world in favor of a new social order; Kierkegaard decided against the bourgeois-Christian world in favor of a restoration of Christianity as proclaimed eighteen hundred years prior.

It was no accident that the political, philosophical, and theological decisionism of the 1920s found a point of connection in Marx and Kierkegaard, as well as in Donoso Cortés. People knew themselves to be between the ages, at a critical turning point.

That such a paradoxical writer of unsurpassable reflectivity—who could not get enough of refined dialectics—could appeal so broadly far beyond the narrow circle of theologians and philosophers is itself a paradox requiring explanation. What was it that appealed so powerfully? Was it the *Edifying Discourses* and *Training in Christianity*, or the *Diary of the Seducer*, or the *Concept of Anxiety* and despair—or the one alongside the other in their inimitable juxtaposition and interplay of erotic-aesthetic, psychological-experimental, and edifying-religious lines of thought? What are the deeper reasons that led so many to immerse themselves in Kierkegaard and—as best they could—reckon with him? Is Kierkegaard merely the illegitimate father of existentialism and dialectical theology, or does he belong to the grand lineage of faithful apologists extending from Tertullian and Augustine to Luther and Pascal? Or is he neither philosopher nor theologian, but rather—as he called himself—a "religious writer"? And what does that mean?

Only one thing is beyond doubt: he is a phenomenon of reflective genius, but of a singular kind—one who wished to use his genius to become a seducer to true Christianity, thereby becoming the most radical critic of existing Christendom. This seduction to Christianity occurred in the awareness that he himself, by his very nature, was denied the ability to reach an immediate imitation of Christ through reflection. Kierkegaard therefore placed the greatest weight on the discernment of spirits: on the difference between a "genius" and an "apostle," between a "poet" and a "witness to the truth," between reflective imagination and religious existence. To mark the critical boundary between these two realms, he called himself a religious writer who wished "without authority merely to draw attention to true

Christianity," in the form of an "indirect communication"—which is why he published most of his writings under pseudonyms.

Only at the end of his life, with the publication of the pamphlets *The Instant*—namely, the instant of decision—did Kierkegaard step forward directly and publicly against the Danish State Church with the questionable claim of a judge. His final reflections on his deathbed, however, concerned whether he had not after all overstrained the severity of the Christian demand relative to its leniency, assuming and presuming more than could be justified in the sense of New Testament Christianity. No one can fail to recognize the gravity of his attempt to reintroduce what is Christian into Christendom; yet neither can one overlook this: the unintended success of his writings consisted mostly in making Christianity interesting again to its "cultured despisers"—far more effectively than Schleiermacher had done.

We shall leave aside Kierkegaard's monstrous claim to have been the only one in his time to know what true Christianity is, as well as the no less problematic significance of his work for a philosophical reflection on the nature of the world and man. About the natural world Kierkegaard has nothing to tell us; and about human nature he has much to say only if one presupposes with him that it is exclusively "spirit" in the Christian sense that "gives life," and that this spirit originates in the Word of God. The astonishing richness of his analyses of the aesthetic, ethical, and religious stages cannot obscure the fact that human nature is not exhausted by distinctions that trace their historical origin to Romanticism. Setting aside Kierkegaard's theological and philosophical dubiousness, we shall limit ourselves to the concept of the *individual* (*Der Einzelne*), which is indeed his foundational concept. With this category, Kierkegaard intended not only to understand himself, but to understand himself in relation to his age and its history.

And what distance us from Kierkegaard today—providing a critical vantage point for assessing his effort—is precisely this: the age within which he sought to act as an individual, and against which he understood himself as a "corrective," is no longer simply ours. Yet the fact that our time is no longer the same as a century ago does not mean it is entirely new and different; on the contrary, the tendencies of the nineteenth century have unfolded and realized themselves to such an extent that Kierkegaard's corrective against his age no longer suffices to render legible once

more the faded "original text" of human existence. His bold foresight of the coming "leveling"—the flattening of man into an organized and anonymous mass machinery—has proven so accurate and fulfilled that it becomes questionable whether his core category of the *individual* can heal the sickness of the age, or whether it is merely the flip side of the massification and leveling he fought against.

The same applies to the concept of *decision*, which is inextricably bound to that of the individual. Together, both concepts—the *deciding individual*—characterize his concept of existence. In literal agreement with Marx, Kierkegaard identified as the supreme law of his age that it was an age of indecisiveness, and against the leveling of all decisive distinctions he set their resolute emphasis. As concrete modes of leveling, he analyzed:

- The leveling of the essential distinction between speech and silence into irresponsible chatter.
- The distinction between the private and the public into a private-public publicity.
- The distinction between form and content into contentless formlessness.
- The distinction between reserve and openness into mere representation.
- The distinction between essential love and sensory dissipation into a passionless flirtation.
- The distinction between objective knowledge and subjective conviction into uncommitted reasoning.

Kierkegaard's summons to a decision, like his summons to the individual, remains within the orbit of the very leveling he aims to counteract. Meanwhile, we have had ample experience of "relentless" decisions and radical distinctions, as well as the counterpart experience that nothing has been resolved by them and that the old problems persist. Decisions, it seems, have their time, only to lose their pathos with the passage of time.

Kierkegaard emphasized with the greatest force that his entire authorial work and activity stood or fell with whether he had applied the decisive concept of the individual correctly—that is, in the direction of the conditions of the age. On his gravestone he wished for no inscription other than the words "That Individual". "With the category of the individual," reads an accounting of his literary activity from 1847, "I marked the beginning of my authorship under my own name; and if

that was stereotypically repeated as a standing formula, then the slogan 'the individual' was no later invention of mine, but that with which I began. To the category 'the individual' my possible ethical significance is unconditionally tied. If this category was correct, if I correctly recognized it as my (by no means pleasant or rewarding) task to draw attention to it... then I stand, and my writings with me... For from the fact that what is said, represented, developed, and articulated in my writings is expressed with imagination, dialectics, psychological acumen, and the like—from that it would by no means automatically follow that the author had understood his age".

The category of the individual is used by Kierkegaard in a double sense: the individual means *everyone*, but *as an individual*. An individual is not someone who distinguishes or excels above others through special gifts or achievements; rather, it is a universal possibility accessible to everyone, and relative to the general leveling of all self-responsible individuals into an anonymous mass apparatus, this possibility becomes a necessity. No one is an individual by nature, but anyone can become one if they have the courage to singularize themselves and pass through the "narrow pass" where one is alone with oneself and before God.

Kierkegaard was convinced that the age, history, "the human race" had to pass through this narrow pass in order to regain a concept of what it means to be a human being and a Christian—two words that for him signified the same thing. The counter-concept to the individual is *universality* (*Allgemeinheit*). The individual sets himself against the universality of globally spread Christendom and the social organization of humanity, but no less against the universality of an all-encompassing philosophical "system" and the appeal—common since Hegel—to the general "spirit of the age" and world history, within which the individual is a meaningless particularity without weight of its own.

"Spoiled by constant intercourse with the world-historical, people want exclusively what is significant; they concern themselves solely with the accidental, world-historical outcome, instead of the essential, the innermost, freedom, the ethical". In relation to ethical existence, the "quantitative dialectic" of world history is mere scenery. The Hegelian, however, refuses to be satisfied with the subjectivity of existing; with a kind of grand self-forgetfulness, he beholds in every era a moral substance and an idea, as though his own existence were a metaphysical speculation

and the individual were the generation itself. He surveys entire forests by looking past all the individual trees.

"Hence perhaps also the many attempts to cling to Hegel, even by people who have seen the plight of his philosophy. One fears that in becoming an individual existing human being, one will disappear without a trace, so that not even daily papers... let alone world-historical speculators, will cast a glance at one... And it is undeniable: if one lacks ethical and religious enthusiasm, one must—over the fact of being an individual human being—despair, or else do otherwise".

The concrete moods and modes of existence in which man loses his footing on the universal of the world and its history, gaining instead the positive possibility of singularization, are phenomena of negativity in Kierkegaard's writings: irony and boredom; melancholy, anxiety, and despair. As the secret of his own melancholy, anxiety revealed itself to him—anxiety whose hidden meaning is the sinful anxiety of despair. Both fulfill the hidden meaning of boredom and irony, which, by transcending all existing and generally valid norms, are themselves already a "substantial negativity".

The penetrating analyses Kierkegaard provides of these existential phenomena all serve the same threefold function:

1. They are meant, first, to place man back upon himself and his stark existence.
2. They are meant, second, to place him thereby before nothingness and into the void.
3. They are meant, third, to confront him with the fundamental decision: *either* to despair, *or* to venture the leap into faith.

Kierkegaard's first major work bears the title *Either/Or*, in opposition to Hegel's mediating thought. In the reversal of despair into faith, the human being as an individual comes to stand before God rather than before nothingness (of boredom, anxiety, and despair)—before God as the creator of being out of nothingness. Only before God can the singularized existence of man be annulled in a positive manner.

This concept of the existing individual has a very specific reference to the general conditions of the time as Kierkegaard experienced and understood them in the mid-nineteenth century. The radical retreat of the individual into himself, into the

inwardness of selfhood, is motivated by the disintegrating conditions of the general, social, and political world. In the passages quoted above, Kierkegaard notes that he made the individual his category because he understood his "age" and "himself within it," managing to express "in a single word, absolutely decisively... that it was an age of dissolution". Anyone wishing to exert an influence, he adds, must know his time; and any serious person with an eye for contemporary conditions will easily see how important it is to work against a confusion that seeks—philosophically (Hegel) and socially (Marx)—to demoralize individuals through chatter about the universal world-spirit or through fantastical theories about society.

"All Europe," reads a journal entry, "is working toward demoralization; but in Copenhagen conditions are so small that my observations and calculations can completely master them". In tiny Denmark, Kierkegaard possessed a complete "specimen" upon which he could diagnose the sickness of Europe. His individual is the product of a singularization out of the universal of his contemporary world.

Unintentionally, Kierkegaard thereby confirms Hegel's critique of romantic subjectivity deciding within conscience, as well as Hegel's insight that deciding subjectivity only gains decisive significance when man is no longer at home in something other and universal because he lacks substantial contents in which he could positively engage. Consequently, a universal significance must now fall precisely to the individual and his decision. What the times demanded—namely social and political reforms—was, in Kierkegaard's conviction, the exact opposite of what it needed: radical singularization toward the inwardness of one's ownmost existence.

Individuality, this precondition for decision and existentiality, stands in a precise—though negation-veiled—relation to the public universality of a leveled world. From the dissolution and bankruptcy of this world, Kierkegaard attempted to draw religious profit. The function of emphasizing the individual is to push the already commencing dissolution of all public obligations to the extreme, so as to achieve—on the basis of the uncommitted nature of all worldly relations—man's consolidation in and with himself, before nothingness and before God.

In this respect, however, Kierkegaard's isolated stance toward his age is by no means an isolated case, but a typical one. Sans religious intentions, B. Bauer and M. Stirner drew analogous conclusions simultaneously. In Kierkegaard's principle of the

*Individual*, Stirner's principle of the *Unique One*, and Bauer's principle of *Self-Consciousness*, the socio-political world is mirrored negatively as mere "crowd" and "mass". Historically, Kierkegaard was the counterpart to Marx, for whom man was not an individual but a social "species-being," and for whom the modern individual was merely the private individual of a specific state form and its corresponding bourgeois society—which Hegel had already characterized as the fully realized "principle of individualism".

According to Hegel and Marx, the individual private person is not an original, independent mode of existence, but a privation: the isolated individual of bourgeois society and of an "abstract" state that abstracts from individuals. Kierkegaard himself cast his private-privative relationship to the public sphere into a vivid simile: he found himself on the same ship as all other passengers of the age, but in such a way that he had a "cabin to himself". Meanwhile, we have all learned that within the course of a history set in motion, there are no lockable cabins, and that time itself is an insurmountable power unless there is something other than temporality and historicity.

Nor did Kierkegaard stop at the anti-historical and anti-political significance of the individual. For what concerned him first and last was the eternal truth of historical Christianity for an existence decided in faith. But once the development of the world had reached its current state, the cause of Christianity stood or fell with the individual. The category of the individual had been used decisively for the first time by Socrates to dissolve the pagan *polis*; in Christendom, it would serve a second time—in reverse—to make so-called Christians into followers of Christ once more by using the individual to dissolve publicly established, world-historical Christendom: the *polis* of secularized Christianity.

The development of the modern world toward leveling tends, in Kierkegaard's conviction, toward the absolute elevation of the individual, which happens to be "the very principle of Christianity!". Both—the world's movement toward leveling and Christianity's demand to exist as an individual before God—coincide as if by a fortunate accident. "Everything (that is happening now) fits $fits$ completely into my theory (namely of the individual), and people shall yet see how I (this exception) understood the age (in its general character)". As the Christian archetype of the individual, he held up the martyr, who lets himself be struck dead by the

"crowd" for the sake of truth. For the cause of Christianity does not stand or fall with religious community, and still less with the official church. If God is to become master over man once more, each person must pass individually through the narrow pass of Christian singularization.

Judged from this perspective, the European catastrophe—as it had manifested so far—was merely an introduction belonging to the "draft," not the "ledger". For throughout Europe, people had worldly strayed with accelerating speed into problems that could not be answered politically or socially, but only religiously—problems Christianity had answered long ago.

Yet how little one can elevate an individuation—even a Christianly understood one—into a principle lacking general political or ecclesiastical-political meaning is shown in Kierkegaard's case by the fact that he felt compelled to draw political consequences from his isolated Christian position. In these consequences of the *individual*, its premises resurface. That Kierkegaard ultimately leaped into church politics is merely the result of his concept of the individual having arisen from politics in the first place. The political element, in this instance, was the religious community of the Church and the social revolution.

The consequence Kierkegaard drew from his singularization was his attack on the Danish State Church and his critique of the social movement. For there could be no talk of the idea of socialism or community saving the age. "The principle of association (which at most can have validity in relation to material interests) is in our time not affirmative, but negative; it is an evasion, a deception, whose dialectic is: while strengthening individuals, it enervates them; it strengthens through numerical joining, but ethically that is a weakening". The great error of socialism was its belief that it could solve the problem of equality within the medium of worldliness, whose very essence is difference.

What Kierkegaard demanded politically was a return to governing with absolute authority, because since the emancipation of the fourth estate, governing was otherwise impossible. In 1847, shortly before the outbreak of revolution, he wrote: "Now it is surely obvious that what is needed, politically understood, is contained in a single word: *government*... The blame for the whole thing lies with an imaginary, half-educated bourgeoisie, demoralized by press flattery, which thought it ought to govern as a public. But perhaps never in history has nemesis arrived so

swiftly; for in the very moment... the bourgeoisie decisively reached for power, the fourth estate rose up. Now it will certainly be said that the fourth estate is guilty, but that is untrue: it is merely the innocent victim that will suffer... and that is supposed to be self-defense; and in a certain sense it is: it is self-defense because the bourgeoisie overturned the state".

Who is not reminded by these sentences of Marx's contemporaneous demand for a dictatorship of the proletariat, Donoso Cortés's demand for a spiritual dictatorship, and ultimately Carl Schmitt's decisionist legitimization of National Socialist dictatorship?

Despite his advocacy for authoritarian government, Kierkegaard was concerned with politics only conditionally, and in no way with political theology. For the true government of the world occurs not through secular authorities, but through God, who rules through martyrs who triumph by letting themselves be killed for the truth. To be authorized as a martyr was Kierkegaard's ownmost desire—one he expressed indirectly by repeatedly assuring us he spoke "without authority," and directly through his final public campaign.

Yet as a "genius," he was not permitted to be killed for the truth like an "apostle"; and as a romantic genius on the borderland between poetic and religious existence, he possessed the Absolute only in the form of negativity. Neither the shared world nor the shared church meant anything in which he could engage. As an isolated individual, he clung to nothingness, and this nothingness became the starting point for his "religious movement," which ultimately ended in an overt attack on the church. This is, in broad strokes, the worldly outline of Kierkegaard's concept of existence, which hangs on the concept of the individual and decision.

What concept of "world," however, is presupposed when speaking of the relation of the individual to the universal of the age? In what sense is the universal against which the individual turns the universal of a world common to all? Does the world in which we live consist solely in the public-common world of a specific era—commonly called world history, which is always political? Or is there a completely different, natural, physical world that precedes all world and human history—a world rarely mentioned by Kierkegaard, and even then as though it were a no-man's-land?

In the end, it is not the individual's relation to his contemporary social and environment, but a fundamental *disproportion* between the individual and the world as such that motivates the specific disproportion to the historical world. What makes singularization what it is, is the experience of the *absolute contingency* of the fact of "man" within the whole of the naturally existing world. In *Repetition*, which concerns the retrieval of true Christianity, Kierkegaard has his "silent confidant" say:

> "One sticks a finger into the dirt to smell what land one is in. I stick my finger into existence—it smells of nothing. Where am I? What does this mean: world? Who enticed me into the whole thing and now leaves me standing here? Who am I? How did I come into the world; why was I not asked, why not introduced to its customs and manners, but instead placed in rank and file as if I had been bought by a crimp? How did I become a stakeholder in this vast enterprise called reality? Why should I be a stakeholder at all? Is it not a voluntary matter?"

This series of provocative questions demonstrates that the question "Who am I?" cannot be answered without reference to "Where am I?"—namely, in the whole of the world. And what is this world, which is as foreign to man as a enterprise whose laws he, as an isolated accident, does not know?

It is neither a Greek cosmos in which man has his appointed place, nor a creation in the biblical sense. For Kierkegaard, the physical universe is no longer, as for Augustine and Thomas, a wondrous creation ordered toward God's covenant with man; nor is it, as for Pascal, the overwhelming—if now anonymous—grandeur of a universe whose infinite extent in space and time shares no common measure with finite man here and now. It is nothing more than an inscrutable "enterprise" in which man does not know why he should participate.

One must visualize this modern consciousness of the absolute contingency of our fallen existence amidst the being of the natural world to understand how it could happen at all that, over the past three centuries, man came to be understood with increasing radicality as a nature-less "existence"—an existence whose "essence" consists solely in the absurdity that it *is* there and *has to be*, thrown into a physical world that has become entirely alien.

Ultimately, the modern concept of existence, characterized by the experience of contingency, arises not from the dissolution of a specific historical-political world, but from the destruction of the Aristotelian cosmos and medieval worldview brought about by the astronomical discoveries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The negative dependence of the modern concept of existence upon modern natural science's concept of nature manifests in Kierkegaard in his defining the interest in one's own existence in explicit opposition to any possible interest in the laws of the natural world.

A thoughtful person, says Kierkegaard, who wishes to comprehend what it means to exist as an individual before God, cannot be interested in nature or the natural sciences, for it makes not the slightest difference to man's moral and religious decisions whether the moon is made of green cheese or some other matter. To this one may reply: to be sure, it makes no difference to our freely chosen decisions whether the earth is flat and the center of the world or an astronomically negligible sphere revolving around the sun; but what are all our decisions—for or against Christianity—within the whole of the naturally existing world?

In the end, the decision-capable human being is only present and human because he is a creature of nature, and as such a riddle to himself. Had any human being ever brought himself into existence, he would also be able to solve his own riddle. But if man is not a creature of nature, but the supernatural creation of a divine will, he would from the outset stand in a meaningful relationship with the created order of the world. Kierkegaard held fast to the belief that man is a creation of divine providence, but the natural creation of heaven, earth, and all earthly creatures seemed to him meaningless. What concerned and interested him exclusively was his historical social environment, and within it the possibility of an individual existence deciding for or against Christian faith. What Kierkegaard contemplated with extreme intensity was the unique whole of an isolated existence thrown back upon itself—not its relationship to the whole of the world that always is by nature.

In Kierkegaard's thought, a transmundane God takes the empty place of the natural world, before whose eternity finite man stands. God and man confront each other unmediated, because man alone is God's image and the world is mere worldliness[1]. The positive background of Kierkegaard's critique of his age is his insight that all provisional, social, and political experiments of the time lack an "unconditional

fixed point," and that the confusion of the age can only be countered by giving human existence the necessary "ballast" to endure before the eternity of God in the torrent of time.

"Let the race and every individual within it attempt to exist without the Unconditional: there will be a whirlpool and nothing more. For a longer or shorter time it may seem otherwise in the interim, as though everything were firm and secure; at bottom it remains a whirlpool. Even the greatest events and the most strenuous life are but a whirlpool—like sewing when one forgets to tie a knot in the thread—until the end is secured by applying the Unconditional, so that the individual, even at a vast distance, enters once again into a relationship with the Unconditional".

In the same vein, a supplement to the concept of the *Individual* opens with the sentence: "In these times everything is politics"—that is, worldly care for world-historical institutions—only to conclude that the age requires no new temporal experiments, but solely eternity: an ever and unconditionally fixed point.

"Grant me but one more word. What the age demands—who could list it all, now that worldliness... has caught fire through spontaneous combustion? What the age needs at its deepest foundation, however, can be expressed completely in a single word: it needs *eternity*. The misfortune of our age is that it has become mere 'time,' mere temporality, which impatiently refuses to hear anything of eternity and then, through an artificial imitation, seeks to render the eternal entirely superfluous—a feat that will never succeed for all eternity. For the more one believes one can dispense with the eternal, or hardens oneself in dispensing with it, the more one fundamentally requires it".

With his gaze fixed on the eternity of God and in foresight of impending revolution, Kierkegaard believed around 1846 that he could predict that this time—in reverse of the Reformation—the political movement would turn into a religious one. For all Europe had strayed with accelerating passion into problems that could not be answered within the medium of the world, but only before eternity. How long a time would still be spent on the merely convulsive could not be known; but it was certain that eternity would come into consideration again once the race was completely exhausted by suffering and bloodshed.

"To regain eternity, blood will be demanded—not the blood of thousands slain as sacrificial victims, no, the precious blood of individuals: of martyrs, those powerful deceased who can accomplish what no living person sending thousands to slaughter can accomplish, what these powerful deceased themselves could not accomplish while living, but can only accomplish as the dead: to compel a raging crowd into obedience, precisely because this raging crowd was permitted in disobedience to strike the martyrs dead".

At this decisive moment of *reversal*, only martyrs would still be able to rule the world, but no secular leaders of any kind. What would then be needed are clergymen, not soldiers or diplomats:

> "Clergymen who can separate the 'crowd' and turn them into individuals; clergymen who do not make excessive demands on scholarship and desire nothing less than to rule; clergymen who, if possible powerfully eloquent, are no less powerful in silence and endurance; clergymen who, if possible discerners of hearts, are no less learned in refraining from judgment and condemnation; clergymen who know how to exercise authority through the art of making sacrifices; clergymen prepared, educated, and formed to obey and suffer, so that they can soothe, admonish, edify, move, but also compel through power—no, through nothing less than compelling through their own obedience, and above all patiently enduring all the patient's bad behavior without being disturbed... For the race is sick, and spiritually speaking, sick unto death".

The power of the age thus led even Kierkegaard, despite his polemic against Hegel's world-historical thinking, into a world-historical speculation. He went so far as to predict the danger that must arise when the catastrophe breaks out: false proclaimers of Christianity will arise, inventors of a new religion who, as demonically infected figures, presumptuously declare themselves apostles—like thieves in the garb of police. Thanks to their promises, they will find a terrifying foothold in the age, until it becomes obvious that the age requires the Unconditional and a truth indifferent to all ages.

With this outlook on a restoration of Christianity through witnesses who let themselves be killed for the truth, Kierkegaard is the contemporary antipode to

Marx's propaganda for a proletarian world revolution. Yet Kierkegaard recognized the true strength of communism to be the "ingredient" of Christian religiosity it still contained.

In view of the eternal truth of God—which exists, however, only for one who exists in faith—Kierkegaard wished to "do away with" the eighteen hundred years separating him from Christian revelation, as though they had never existed. In the concept of *repetition*, he devised a possibility to bring the history of decay of world-historical Christianity back to its origin in the faithful appropriation of the Christian message. As an appropriation unique to each person, this origin is not a past historical reality, but an ever-present existential possibility unbound to constantly changing historical situations.

As a retrieving of oneself from fallenness to the external world, repetition is a remembering that is simultaneously an inward-turning. The paradox of repetition, however, is that—unlike the Platonic doctrine of recollection—it remembers not backward, but "forward". It is an interpretation of the Christian concept of rebirth, through which man, lost to the world, regains himself through God's grace and his own conversion. Through repetition, Kierkegaard's silent confidant learns to know the "conductor" he wished to ask why he exists at all—that is to say, why he is in the world.

The question of eternity, without which the question of temporality finds no answer, was posed within philosophy after Kierkegaard only by Nietzsche. His doctrine of the "eternal return of the same" is the necessary consequence of God being dead for him, rendering that which ever-is a world circling within itself. But when the natural world occupies the vacated place of a transmundane God, man's position toward it changes simultaneously, and the contingency of human existence within the whole of being becomes a problem in a way entirely different from the creation story—according to which heaven and earth were indeed created before man, but nonetheless for his sake.

Which alternative is the true one—whether man is a creature of God or a natural accident within the whole of the physical world—cannot be easily decided. What confront each other here are not arbitrary opposing propositions, nor two opposing "projects," but faith and inquiring knowledge. Talk of a "knowledge of faith" and references to the unprovable premises of all knowledge cannot bridge this divide.

Nor can one blindly decide for faith or for inquiring knowledge without pulling the rug from under both. One must above all know what faith is on the one hand and what knowledge is on the other in order to decide for one or the other.

It is the dubious merit of Kierkegaard that, against Hegel's sublation (*Aufhebung*) of faith into rational-perceptive knowledge, he understood faith as a "leap" into faith, grounding this decision-ready passion in despair. Kierkegaard held the strange opinion that Christianity had never been anything other than such a desperate leap into faith.

Correspondingly leap-like is the relationship of the existing individual to the natural world—that great "enterprise" in which he is involuntarily involved without knowing why or to what end. Because faith as Christian faith cannot be reduced to mere believing as such, but believes in something specific—namely that the revelation of eternal truth occurred at a specific moment in history—there arises the paradox of the decisive "instant" (*Augenblick*) in which God's eternity revealed itself in time.

Kierkegaard's paradoxical Christianity knows only the worldlessly "existing" individual and an equally worldless God. It lacks faith in creation, within which man and the world belong together and are ordered toward one another by their Creator. To this existential-theological eclipse of creation, which begins as early as the Cartesian Pascal, there corresponds in existential philosophy of all shades the lack of a natural concept of the world as that which ever-is and encompasses all, in which man by nature lives and also dies[2].

**Footnotes**

[1] *Cf.* Augustine, *Soliloquia* I, 2: "*Quid ergo scire vis? Deum et animam scire cupio. – Nihilne plus? Nihil omnino.*" ["What then do you wish to know? I desire to know God and the soul. – Nothing more? Nothing at all."] *Cf.* Luther, Weimar Edition 40/2, p. 238: The proper and singular subject of theology is man guilty of sin and condemned, and God the justifier and savior of such a sinner; whatever is asked or discussed outside this subject is error and vanity.

[2] See on this by the author: *Nietzsches Philosophie der ewigen Wiederkehr des Gleichen* (1956).